



CONVENTION ON WETLANDS  
CONVENTION SUR LES ZONES HUMIDES  
CONVENCIÓN SOBRE LOS HUMEDALES  
(Ramsar, Iran, 1971)



## PRESS RELEASE

### Nordic governments call for stronger protection of peatlands as a buffer against climate change

**Gland, Switzerland | 27 May 2015** - The Nordic Council of Ministers for the Environment made a joint statement on the importance of peatlands in preserving biodiversity and limiting human-induced climate change. The statement underlined the importance of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands as a global framework to spur national action and regional and international cooperation to protect and restore peatlands.

Peatlands are the world's greatest storehouse of carbon – they cover only 3% of the earth's surface, yet they contain more carbon than all the world's forests. However as peatlands are currently little understood, in many places they are earmarked to be excavated, drained and destroyed, often for agriculture. In doing this, huge amounts of carbon are added to the atmosphere each year. While all countries contain some areas of peatland, they are most concentrated in the northern countries clustered around the Arctic Circle.

On 27 April 2015, the Nordic Council of Ministers for the Environment made a joint Statement on the importance of peatlands in mitigating climate change (see the statement [here](#)). This statement will be taken to the climate summit in Paris in December 2015.

The Nordic Ministers also underlined the importance of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands as a global framework to preserve and restore peatlands. A draft Resolution on “Peatlands, climate change and wise use: implications for the Ramsar Convention” has been submitted by the Nordic countries to the 12<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention (COP12), to be held 1-9 June in Uruguay. Peatlands will also to be the topic of a side-event taking place on 3 June during COP12.

Ms. Doina Catrinoiu of Romania, the Chair of the Ramsar Convention's Standing Committee, responded to the Nordic Ministers' Statement saying, “The loss and degradation of peatlands worldwide is an issue of great concern to the Ramsar Convention. Fortunately, peatlands can be restored to once again store carbon, rather than emit it, by raising the water level back to historic levels, or “re-wetting”. As many peatlands contain iconic species of plants, animals and birds, a number of these areas have also been conserved by designating them as Wetland Sites of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention.”

The Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention, Dr Christopher Briggs, said: “I welcome the Nordic Ministers' Statement to COP12 on behalf of the Ramsar Convention on wetlands. In view of the importance of peatlands to the world's climate system, I therefore request all the Ramsar Contracting Parties to take note of the Statement as well as the draft Resolution on peatlands to be discussed at COP12 in Uruguay, 1-9 June”.

Further technical information is contained in [this](#) document “Peatlands, climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation” which was prepared by the Ramsar Regional Initiative NorBalWet for the information of the Nordic Council of Ministers for the Environment and published following their Statement.

## **Note to editors**

### **About the Ramsar Convention**

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is the intergovernmental treaty that provides the global framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands. It is the only global treaty to focus on a single ecosystem. The Convention was signed in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and entered into force in 1975. Since then, 168 countries, almost 90% of UN member states from the entire world’s geographic regions have acceded and become Contracting Parties.

Under this treaty, member states undertake to protect and sustainably use all the wetlands on their territory by undertaking local measures and collaborate through international cooperation to maintain the ecological characteristics of wetlands. Each Member State upon adopting the Convention, designates at least one site considered to be of high value to the country and the world because of the ecosystem services they provide. These sites are added to the network of Ramsar Sites of International Importance. Currently there are over 2100 designated Ramsar sites around the world, covering an area of 208 million hectares, an area larger than Mexico.

### **About Ramsar COP12**

The 12th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (COP12) will be held in Punta del Este at the Conrad Resort, Uruguay, from 1 to 9 June 2015. It is the decision-making body of the Convention and meets every three years to assess the progress of the Convention, consider emerging issues and approve the Secretariat’s work plan.

### **About wetlands**

The definition of the word ‘wetland’, under the Convention, is any land area that is saturated or flooded with water, either seasonally or permanently. Inland wetlands include aquifers, lakes, rivers, streams, marshes, peatlands, ponds, flood plains and swamps. Coastal wetlands include all coastlines, mangroves, saltmarshes, estuaries, lagoons, seagrass meadows and coral reefs.

**Ramsar photo gallery:** [Peatlands](#)

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